

UNCLASSIFIED

1/10/79

(S)

39

R

AX021

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

January 10, 1979

PARTICIPANTS: Colonel (Ret.) Vicente San Roman, Assistant Secretary for Internal Security, Ministry of Interior

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Garet P. Grafeld, Director

Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s):

Classify: () In Part ☒ In Full

Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Declassify on Reason

Charles Brayshaw, ARA/ECA, Department of State, Washington, D.C.

Kenneth Sackett, Vice Consul, American Embassy Buenos Aires

F. Allen Harris, Political Officer, American Embassy, Buenos Aires

PLACE : Ministry of Interior, Buenos Aires

SUBJECT : Human Rights

COPIES TO : ARA/ECA - Mr. Bumpus AMB
HA/HR - Mr. Flood DCM
HA/REF - Ms. Chavchavadze POL/R
INR/RAR - Mr. Buchanan USICA
ARA - Mr. Lister ECOM
INR/OIL/NFAC/ - Mr. Schwab DAO
ORPA/LAD CONS

Objectives for 1979

Colonel San Roman stated that he had identified several objectives to improve the GOA's handling of its Poder Ejecutivo Nacional (PEN) prisoners which he hoped would be implemented by March, 1979.

The first objective is to transfer all PEN prisoners to six major prisons -- La Plata, Sierra Chica, Villa Devoto, Rawson Resistancia and Caseros. The last facility will be used only for transit prisoners. The responsibility for the PEN prisoners in these institutions would reside with the Ministry of Interior, not with the Ministry of Justice or provincial penal authorities as is now the case.

UNCLASSIFIED

81F184
515

UNCLASSIFIED

2

The second objective is to remove those prisoners from PEN status who have been charged with crimes in the civilian or military justice systems. San Roman added that over half of the current PEN prisoners fall into this category. He noted that he did not expect to be 100 percent successful in this effort, but if he could transfer 85 percent of the charged prisoners he would be satisfied.

The third objective is for the Ministry of Interior to control the right of option process. San Roman said that with the Chile problem, the Min Int was not receiving timely replies on the right of option cases. This made meeting the 120-day legal deadline very difficult. San Roman stated that the greatest obstacle to the approval of right of option applications to leave the country was the negative attitude of the Tri-Service Presidential Commission which San Roman said turned down almost every case. He hoped that the Ministry could change the burden of proof in these cases so that if a Presidential Advisory Commission member or a military unit did not respond on time the decision of the Ministry of Interior would be final.

The fourth objective is to issue a statement to the Argentine public demonstrating that no clandestine prisoners are being held by the Armed Services. San Roman suggested that the government would take the necessary actions to make this statement convincing so that individuals who were not accounted for (i.e. disappeared) at the time of the statement would be legally presumed to be dead.

COMMENT: Presidential and Foreign Ministry sources have indicated that the GOA has developed an action program in preparation for the late May visit of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC). The objectives outlined by San Roman and the time frame for their accomplishment strongly suggest that these constitute the government's preparations for the OAS' group's visit.

San Roman's comments about a credible governmental assurance that it has recognized all its prisoners and about creating a legal presumption that all those remaining disappeared should tacitly be acknowledged to have died in confrontations with the security forces echoes reports we have recently heard from well placed Church sources of an Army/Air Force proposal of last April. This proposal reportedly had three phases: resurface the clandestine prisoners, announce that those still disappeared were probably killed, and change Argentine civil laws to shorten the time periods for presumptive death.

END COMMENT.

UNCLASSIFIED

[REDACTED]

UNCLASSIFIED

3

PEN Prisoner Population

San Roman noted that all the PEN prisoners are placed in three categories, which are reviewed monthly. Category I receives the best treatment. The categorization depends on both a prisoner's past record and his/her adjustment to prison life. San Roman noted that some persons who were held on minor charges rebelled in detention and were dangerous prisoners. These individuals would be placed in category III. While others charged with serious crimes, might adapt well to prison life and would be placed in categories I or II.

San Roman stated that the majority of the PEN prisoners were between 22 and 32 years of age. He said they had one prisoner of 16. He had ordered a special study on this young man because of his age. The psychologist found that the youth was "incorrigible." San Roman noted that a number of older "ideologues" are detained; the oldest being 80.

San Roman said that most of the PEN prisoners were former students at universities in La Plata, Cordoba, Rosario and Bahia Blanca. He noted ominously that there were not many former Buenos Aires University students under PEN.

In response to a question, San Roman said that there was no relationship between a person's chances to receive approval for his right of option application and his jail category.

COMMENT: San Roman's statement regarding the effect of prisoner's category and his optionability was not convincing. We imagine that a prisoner's prison deportment is a major factor in the Ministry of Interior's consideration regarding that person's release. END COMMENT.

Lokman Case

San Roman went on at great length about how ungrateful Mrs. Lokman was. He said that as soon as her husband was removed from the Third Corps area, Mrs. Lokman had immediately demanded his release under the right of option program. San Roman stated that Lokman was guilty of "economic subversion" which was one of the most dangerous forms of subversions as money was true power. He characterized Lokman as the "Lopez Rega of Cordoba." After our comments about his exaggeration, San Roman got serious and said that Lokman was an unpopular figure and the best thing would be to allow six months to

[REDACTED]

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

4

go by for the waters to quiet before pushing for a right of option certificate for him.

Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo

San Roman stated flatly that the government had decided to prevent any future demonstrations by the Mothers. He said that Ministry of Interior sources who had infiltrated the Mothers' group had reported that the group was strongly influenced by Communist and Socialist Party members. He cited a Mrs. Israel as one of the PCA members in the group and noted that she was a dangerous natural political leader.

Disappearance Cases

In a reply to a question regarding a Min Int statistical study on disappeared cases, San Roman said that in rough numbers the Ministry had received 3,000 disappearance reports for 1976, 1800 for 1977, and 400 through the first ten months of 1978. (Note: San Roman's figures jibe with a Foreign Ministry source for 1976 and 1977, but understate by half of the 1978 ten month number.) San Roman noted that in general individuals who disappeared in 1976 and in the first half of 1977 were disappeared for good. He stated that in the latter half of 1977 and in 1978, anti-subversive policy had changed and more people were placed under the PEN and allowed to reappear.

CLEARANCES:

POLCOUNS: WHHallman

DCM: MChaplin

CONS: KSackett

POL: FAHarris: jk
1/17/79

UNCLASSIFIED